ON OUR COVER

ROBBIE ROBERTSON

By the time The Band recorded their first LP, the revolutionary Music From Big Pink, they had already been together for over six years. A decade later they bowed out with The Last Waltz. Now, nearly nine years to the day, Robbie Robertson has returned with a brooding and powerful new album.

by Steven H. Simenowitz

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INNERVIEWS

JOE COCKER
A positive outlook by Jesse Nash

RUSH
Freer and bolder by Lisa Fantino

MARIANNE FAITHFULL
Where she wants to be by Roman Kozak

MARTHA DAVIS
Out on her own by Liz Deringer

CHICK COREA
Innity of creation by David Anrum

CONCERT COMMENTS

LYNYRD SKYNYRD
Nassau Coliseum, Li, NY by Mark Hendrickson

BoDeANS
Ritz, NYC by Mark Hendrickson

PINK FLOYD
Madison Sq. Garden, NYC by Roman Kozak

HIGHLIGHTS

THE OPENING ACT
by Liz Farrell

MANHATTAN HIGHLIGHTS
by Roman Kozak & David Allen

BILLBOARD'S TOP CHARTS
Singles, Albums, Club Play, 12"

ROCK NEWS
Local and National News

PASSAGES
Chris Hillman, Simon F. & more

LOOKIN' OUT MY BACK DOOR
by Al Pereira

AURAL SURGERY
by Paul E. Peaghie

BOSTON BROADCAST
by Carter Alan

LONDON CALLING
by Chris Jagger

JERSEYSIDE
by Christopher Bilani

FOLK TALK
by Anne Leighton

GIOI
by Richard Sigiovanni

STAR CHART
by Carol Reimer

PERSONALS

TECH TALK

STUDIO NOTES
Who's got the hottest tracks

INDUSTRY FILE
Business directory

PRODUCT PREVIEWS
The latest advances

TECH & EFFECTS
by Art Bromberg

ELECTRONIC MUSICIAN
by George Padron

THE STUDIO REPORT
by Mickie Schaffer

WORKSHOPS

LEGAL LICKS
by Steven H. Simenowitz, Esq.

PIANO JAZZ IMPROV
by Dennis McManus

GROUP EXPERIENCE
by Rosanne Soifer

WRITE THAT HIT!
by Jessie Bulitt

CLASSICAL COVERAGE
by Tom Sagardis

VOCAL INSIGHTS
by Katie Agresta

NEW CONCEPT GUITAR
by Mike Raymond Steuer

GUITARISTS ONLY
by George Bien

GUITAR STYLES
by Jay Jacobs

COLLECTOR'S CORNER
by Chris X. Ambajedas

LUTHER'S WORKBENCH
by Joe Pickler

ELECTRONIC DRUM BEAT
by Billy Messinetti

DRUM BEAT
by Frank Martin

SABIAN CYMBALS
by Andy Glass

MAY MUSIC AND LAUGHTER FILL YOUR HOLIDAY SEASON.

From the staff of The Music Paper

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lisant that you'll get the job done," says Geddy. "You know you can take a break every three weeks and go home or do what you need to do every few weeks or get away from the record and that it is probably better for it in the end anyway. And you can have a calmer - not less determined, but a less insular - view of working."

Ah, to have that luxury, to work a few weeks and to rest a few weeks! But wait a minute. Geddy may go home, but he doesn't really stop working. In fact, he did a lot of writing for this album on his Macintosh personal computer...his whole keyboard setup is controlled by a computer!

The program he used was called "Performer" and he was able to work as a composer and arranger because he could move parts of songs around with the touch of a button and then store them. This was great for him because once the keyboard parts were done, then he could go back to playing bass and singing.

"It's enabled me to layer and place any synthesizer I wanted at any point I wanted, so I could really look at it as an arranger, not limiting it to what I could reach with two hands. So I could just layer channel after channel after channel onto my computer," he says.

As with the last album, Power Windows, Andy Richards had to program the synthesizers and they used nearly every brand of keyboard known to mankind. The Macintosh computer was Geddy's main sequencer device in the studio and he used the new Prophet V, Akai samplers and DX7s. Richards liked the Fairlight Series III and his PPG and his Super Jupiter and that still doesn't scratch the surface of what they used to make Hold Your Fire.

Now, what will they be using on the road? The band expects to reproduce 98% of the studio sounds onstage. Neil has a sophisticated percussion setup that can also trigger keyboard parts and Alex will be playing keyboard parts during songs where there's no guitar for a bridge or passage. As for Geddy, he'll be singing, playing bass and hitting the old synthesizers, not all at once and not in that order, but the timing should be interesting.

Getting it together is difficult but keeping it together is the challenge and Geddy says Rush's rhythm section is an integral part of the band's sound. He believes its hyperactivity won't let it just fall to the bottom.

"It gives us a different perspective than a lot of bands," says Geddy. "Where it's most people's tendency to use a bass as something to provide bottom end but not really melodically important, in our case it is melodically important and also energetically important. And Neil's complexities interwine with my melodic patterns and I think it gives us a far bigger orchestral sound."

As a writer/player Geddy also finds it helpful to keep his vocal melodies in mind when he's writing his bass lines and vice versa. If not, he'll find himself trying to do the impossible and he admits that songs like "Turn The Page" require more practice on his part because the bass is all over the place and it's not easy to sing when you're concentrating on playing heavy riffs.

Different rhythms are what make this new album interesting, more commercial, more accessible. Yet whatever word is used to describe it, variety probably fits it best.

There are the usual power rockers like "Force Ten" and the single, "Time Stand Still," to keep longtime Rush fans happy. But the atypical, oriental-sounding "Tai Shan" or the primitive "High Water" may draw attention from another market...on "High Water" it was the African rhythms that caught my ear.

That song deals with a calling back, the sense that life comes from the water," says Geddy. "It's like there's a special relationship when you've got the sea and the kind of things that get stirred up inside of you by the sea and really that's what the song is about and it sort of traces our growth.

It takes a special relationship to make the music work in Rush, a special bond between Geddy, Alex and Neil, and it's one that has weathered the test of time, creative differences, recreational differences and outside interests.

"It's really difficult to hang around each other that many years a day but in the end I think we find each other enough, friendly though, to sort of keep each other in check," Geddy laughs.

"We have too much invested timewise in a particular project to want to subvert it somehow by actions that aren't actually worthy of it."

Geddy says life in Rush is crazier than a marriage but they're seasoned musicians and cayenne pepper, the music stays hot! (Hey guys, that's his recipe, not mine!)

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